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## **Festivals on the High Street: Revitalising business and communities in the UK**

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### **Introduction**

This chapter considers the tradition and impact of festivals taking place in high street settings. Using examples from the UK it reflects on recent issues that have affected the decline experienced by high streets in the UK and explores how arts festivals and public outdoor events have been used to revitalise business and community engagement. We will explore two case studies in London presenting current research on mapping community and business engagement in these settings.

Festivals have historically been highly embedded and integrated within the socio-economic life of societies, for example as celebrations and cultural activities embedded within fairs, markets and squares. However, while in recent years we have seen more and more festivals blooming in many communities, bringing new cultural and social life to our cities, we have also seen the decline of independent economic activities on high streets, with increasingly unsustainable rents pushing smaller traders out in favour of large chains and cheap imported goods often resulting in an increase of empty shops. This chapter questions whether there could be more integration and engagement between artistic activities embedded in festivals and local shops, through cultural intervention that is mutually beneficial.

The first part of the chapter brings together the literature on arts festivals and their impact in communities and places, with recent issues emerging in the UK about the decline of the high street and its viability, which has been highlighted in extensive academic and policy reports (Wrigley and Dolega, 2011; Portas, 2011). Here, we highlight the importance of considering culture as a key ingredient in the future development of high streets, raising awareness of festivals in bringing the right mix of social, cultural but also economic opportunities for local high streets and presenting two case studies which highlight these integrated dynamics. In the second part, we discuss the case studies and methodologies adopted. The case studies are recent arts-focused interventions that specifically use cultural activity to stimulate positive social engagement with the high street whilst